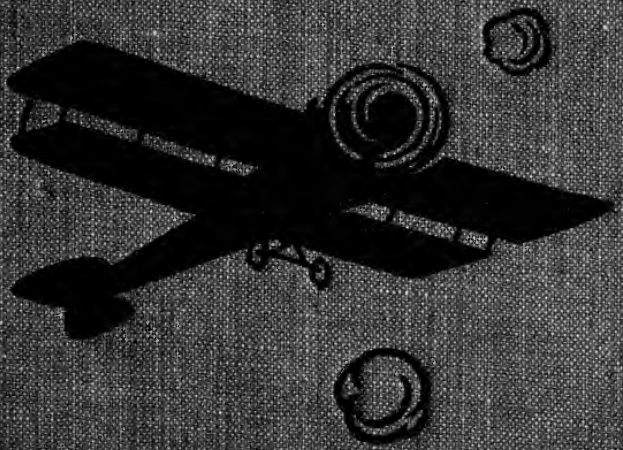

# SHORT FLIGHTS

## WITH THE C[illegible]AVALR[illegible]

By "SPIN"

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*Short Flights: with the Cloud Cavalry*

# SHORT FLIGHTS

## WITH THE CLOUD CAVALRY

BY

SPIN, pseud.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

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## *Dedication*

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## *Contents*


| | PAGE |
|---|---|
| FOREWORD | ix. |
| THE NEW WORLD | 13 |
| THE DAY | 21 |
| ARCHIE | 29 |
| THOSE INDISPENSABLE PEOPLE | 35 |
| THE FEAR OF FEAR | 43 |
| A DAILY ROUND | 55 |
| "365" | 63 |
| HOT AIR GAPS | 73 |
| AN ORDERLY DOG'S DAY | 83 |
| ACK-EMMA | 91 |
| BUMPS | 99 |
| CRASHES AND LANDINGS | 105 |
| SALVAGE | 115 |
| "OCCASIONS" | 123 |

PAGE

LOST - - - - - - - - 133

LIAISON - - - - - - - 147

BANGERS - - - - - - - 157

THE VACANT SEAT - - - - - 167

FRITZ - - - - - - - 175

MR. METEOR - - - - - - 183

SIDE-SHOWS - - - - - - 189

TEN MINUTES - - - - - - 201

THE LAST FLIGHT - - - - - 211

## *Foreword*

The following sketches have been written from a few odd notes made from time to time in France and other places.

Since they were written, times have changed, no longer do mist and clouds mean an indolent day spent in exploring some ancient French town; few are the hot air gaps that prevent our "intrepid aviators" (as the Press is so fond of calling them) from executing awe-inspiring stunts over the heads of our strafing enemies. Machines now fly at far lower and far higher altitudes than they did a year ago.

It is hoped that some of the sketches will awaken memories of past days in the minds of those who fly. Those who do not fly but

take an interest in the art, will possibly find an insight into the lives led by those who make war at high altitudes. They may also find that pilots are in reality ordinary men, possessing the ordinary attributes of man—and a few others—and lacking in many cases—imagination.

Incidents similar to those described in the ensuing pages happen almost daily, and to those who are amused by, and who study youthful human nature, life is full of interest.

# *I.—The New World*

## *The New World*

To those endowed with an imagination, I suppose leaving the security of the warm brown earth is the most unnerving portion of the first few flights. The roar of the engine that is to bear you aloft into the new world is slightly disconcerting, and the hot smell of the castor oil which in time one gets to love is at first apt to make one feel rather sick. But these slight fancies fade away in that first rush through the morning air, when the wind stings against your face and your blood races through the veins and makes you want to laugh and sing and shout; it can only be dimly compared to the after effect of a cold bath on a healthy body. A Canadian was

once asked why he took up flying. His immediate answer was, "I guess I'm a crazy mutt."

As it happened he was, but I don't think it was this that prompted him to fly. As an explorer seeks out new lands, so do many people thirst for new sensations, and in flying they find the best of all. To watch an aeroplane on a sunny day—well piloted—gracefully turning and soaring through the sunlight air, diving to the hum of the wind among the wires, slowly spiralling, answering to the slightest whim of the pilot within—it seems as if machine and man were one live thing revelling in the joy of life and being. Imagine yourself, if you can, ten thousand feet above the earth on a sunny spring morning. Imagine the even roar of the engine in front of you and the

sweet fresh air stinging your face to a rosy warmth; the world stretching out like an enormous round map beneath you seems very trivial, while you, the master of the air, swoop and dive so far above it. The sun is all around you; it glints and shines on the whirling propeller in front and lights the world with loveliness beneath you.

Green pastures cut by silver streams and tiny woods are stretching far away to the misty blur of the twinkling sea. On and on you rush, while the world beneath seems to slide slowly away. It is hard to realise that you are travelling about ninety miles an hour. Tiny towns and villages come and pass behind you, and all the world is intersected by narrow yellow lanes turning and twisting from the long straight roads on which the

antlike vehicles seem stationary. A ghostly cloud, like a puff of smoke, glides by; another and larger one appears, in front a twist—a sudden bank, and you leave it far behind. Away to the left great rolls of thunder clouds mass heavy and solid—the sunshine falls athwart them in golden pencils, lighting the shadowed ground beneath in uneven circles. It's time to roost. The sun starts tinting the fleecy clouds with rosy smudges and the world beneath grows dim and shadowy. The streams appear like rivers of running blood. Slowly the great red sun sinks in a blaze behind the violet hills. A sudden hush as the pilot "switches off" gives way to the rushing hum of the wires and the whistle of the propeller. Down goes the nose of the machine and the world grows rapidly

larger and more stable in the quick descent: the wires hum louder and louder as the speed increases, until the machine seems to shriek with a protest of being forced from its high command.

Then from a gentle spiral you come out above the aerodrome, glide down and bump to a gentle standstill. Back again in the old world life seems very slow, and one vaguely gets that sensation of solidity and reality that meets one coming out of a theatre into the cold and rainy streets.

## *II.—The Day*

## *The Day*

THERE was so much to do and so much to be thought of that it was not until one got into bed the night before the first day that one wondered what it was going to be like.

"I wonder what Archie feels like," said James, my pilot, from a pile of blankets the other side of the hut.

I put the light out and curling up in my bed beneath a mass of coats and rugs, thought of the day that was almost gone. Looking back, it seemed to be weeks ago that my servant had knocked on my door and reminded me that in half an hour I was to fly over to France. Then came the packing, the unpacking to find

one's flying cap, the last look at the hut, the last breakfast eaten off packing crates, and then the start.

It had been a perfect day, and one had looked down rather wistfully at the sun-lit English fields and villages speeding away far below and the faint line of sparkling blue away to the south—that narrow strip of water that divides so much—and then came the landing at Dymstone, the donning of enormous and exceedingly uncomfortable life-belts, the shrieks of mirth at little fat McJim, our youngest pilot, because he looked so much wider than he was tall, and the hurried lunch off chocolate and biscuits.

The Major "took off" and one by one we followed him, climbing and turning until we all had got our height and

had fallen into place in the formation. Reluctantly we turned our eyes from the white cliffs and the red roofs of Dymstone, and faced the misty line of the unknown land across the stretch of blue sea. Here and there a tiny black destroyer raced through the water, leaving two great lines of white surf behind, but beyond these there was very little to break the sheet of blue. For a quarter of an hour we had droned our way along towards the unknown, watching the misty line become more real, until it slowly revealed a land of long straight roads and green undulating fields. We crossed a town and a mass of canals stretching their long arms to the south, east and west. A little later came the landing at the depôt, stamping and waving our arms we drove out the cold

waiting for the others and sniffing the strange, unfamiliar air of France. A machine appeared a black speck far away. "I bet that's Billy," said McJim, and critically we watched the landing. "It can't be Billy," said someone, "it's far too good," and when the machine "taxied" up, Billy's rosy face beamed out at us with a satisfied grin.

Only two machines had failed to arrive on account of engine trouble in England, and in two tenders we drove down to O——.

After an amazingly good lunch at the Vin d'Or we again set out, and as the daylight began to fade we arrived at our final destination.

Then came the scramble for huts and the looting of past owners' property.

At half-past six the Major summoned

us to the office and detailed four machines for patrol the following morning. We were not to make ourselves offensive, but just to spy out the land.

As the transport hadn't yet arrived we dined off boxes, listening to the unfamiliar rumble of guns and feeling that the war was very near. Eight of us thought a good deal of the morning.

I think we were all fairly tired, and after a few reminiscences purposely made kind from the pilots who had been out before, we wandered off to unpack and smoke a last cigarette before getting into bed.

The last inmate had left the hut, I was sharing with Jimmy, in fairly good order. We surmised that he had left in a hurry, as the windows possessed curtains, and most of the floor was covered

with mats. There was also a chair and a table, and the inevitable "Kitchener" faces simpered down at us in large quantities from the walls.

"I wonder what Archie feels like?" said Jimmy sleepily. I wondered too, and fell asleep thinking of a house in a little English village and a white-haired lady.

## *III.—Archie*

## *Archie*

After breakfast on the aerodrome next morning we had our first sight of aerial hate. A dull sound of crumping made us look to the east—the sky was covered in one part with a cloud of soft, black woolly balls which gradually expanded and faded away. A machine seemed to be almost in the middle of it, and we momentarily expected to see it burst into flames and fall in pieces—but nothing happened and Archie soon stopped.

"Ten o'clock, Walter!" said Jimmy in a decided voice. We got into the machine and settled down.

At seven thousand feet we gazed with extraordinary interest at the trenches

and hole-marked swamp around them, little bursts of white smoke appeared here and there and slowly drifted away in the breeze. There was no sign of life anywhere.

An appalling explosion behind me made me turn like lightning. Two large clouds of smoke about fifty feet away, and another nearer and on the right, for a moment staggered me—and then—"Archie!" I yelled to Jimmy. Jimmy turned and beamed at me and side slipped vigorously. The next Archie was far above us and in front, Jimmy again turned and beamed, and I nodded and felt that Archie was nothing to be alarmed at at all.

A few minutes later, as I was watching a machine some distance over the lines being pursued by the black explosions,

one suddenly burst right underneath it, the machine faltered for a moment, side slipped, and spun down with a long riband of flame streaking out behind it. My confidence seemed to subside, and again I felt that Archie was a thing to take quite seriously.

Every machine that came near us made me feel uneasy until I spotted the red, white and blue circles, and then they comforted me as nothing else in the air can.

Two of the other three machines had met Huns; they were very full of their brief scraps, and the ante-room was a babel of voices as we entered. The fourth machine had got two small shrapnel holes in their planes, and its occupants were making as much noise as if they had been shot down in flames and come out of it unscathed.

Jimmy and I were the only ones who had nothing to talk about, so we drowned the rest with vivid stories from our imaginations, and I can still see our elderly and innocent Australian pilot of "30," wide-eyed and staring, ejaculating breathlessly, "*Nooooo, reely??*" as we told him how the shells had passed in pairs between our struts.

The "first crump" is always the worst, and as time goes on familiarity breeds very nearly contempt, and one learns to avoid the whining buzz of broken shrapnel which, to the pilot fresh from home, is distinctly embarrassing.

## *IV.—Those Indispensable People*

## *Those Indispensable People*

THERE are few squadrons that do not possess a mechanical maniac—a familiar figure and a general nuisance in the workshop lorries—a figure whose hair is never brushed, whose clothes are in the last state of decay and whose hands are only clean at meal times, and not always then. Enter his hut and you will find it a mass of gadgets, wireless parts, wheels, old aerials and a thousand devices which never function. His conversation is incoherent with long technical words, and he'll explain how anything works from a magneto to a tramway car without the slightest provocation. His family must have a rotten time when he's at home,

but he's usually a very good fellow at heart.

Another type is the squadron lunatic, an invaluable being, his face is very often sufficient to drive away that trying attack of dyspepsia. His imitations, his irresponsible actions, his love of laughter and practical joking, his apparent childishness —all make one rather fearful of endangering one's life in a frail construction of wood and fabric 10,000 feet above the earth with him as pilot—but he's as steady and as capable as any man when there's a man's job to be done. And, then, we have the War Baby. These strange creatures are beginning to abound in most Squadrons. The big blue eyes, the red baby mouth, the smooth cheek innocent of razors nearly always give the impression of great innocence, but

in reality beneath these attractions lies the most diabolical cunning, and they can very often lead the old hand through the many and delicate hot air paths which abound in the life of an aviator. They make admirable girls for the local pierrot troupes, and sometimes create the most amusing *contre-temps*.

The "affaire" of the dashing officer who fell violently in love with the leading "lady" of an amateur troupe is still warm in the hearts of the many who were present when this particular War Baby pulled off his wig and discomfited the admirer. The unfortunate fellow is still wondering whether he carried it off all right. Another indispensable is the cock-tail manufacturer. His sacred hour is the hour before mess. From many bottles of all sizes and shapes he produces

liquids of the most violent colours and mysterious tastes, which he solemnly avers are at that moment creating "furores" in Town or New York, or wherever is the natural home of the Cocktail. His interest in his work never flags, and one is invariably greeted on entering the anteroom by cries of "Come and try the 'Health-and-Strength'; What! you've never heard of it—Good Lord, where were you dragged up?" Of course one has never heard of it, because he's only just created it by upsetting something on the floor and sweeping it up into a glass. Then there's the piano player—not the instrument you play hurriedly upon with your feet, but the fellow who can sit down at the piano and play anything from a classic opera to a very much syncopated fox-trot or an unconventional song of

doubtful origin, or accompany an artiste on a squadron-made violin.

He is the most indispensable of the lot, and many a French peasant has listened from his cottage door to the volume of sound—the roar of many voices emitted from a Flying Mess—Somewhere in France in celebration of some great event—such as the full moon or another Hun brought down. Can it still be said the English take their pleasures sadly ? I wonder.

## *V.—The Fear of Fear*

## *The Fear of Fear*

"NERVES! Ransom hasn't any nerves. He's the stoutest fellow in my flight." The three Flight Commanders were sitting in a hut one summer night discussing their individual flights. Rivalry was always apt to be a little rampant when the three got on to the subject of their individual pilots. "I tell you Ransom hasn't got a nerve in his body," continued the tallest of the three emphatically. "If I had the slightest doubt I'd get him back to Blighty at once—his time's up to-morrow anyway, but we can't spare him you know just yet." The subject of their conversation was sitting alone in his hut, his head resting miserably on his hands, and in

his mind was an awful fear—the fear of himself, the fear that he might show it. He got up and paced slowly up and down, and taking a cigarette lit it with a trembling hand. Suddenlyhe stopped, and opening the door looked up at the clear and starlit sky.

A fleecy cloud or two sped across the face of the round white moon, and away in the East the dull roar of guns and the tiny points of red light in the sky hastened some bomb-dropping flight on its way into Hunland. With a slight shiver he turned and closed the door. Someone suddenly knocked. Ransom started. "Come in." An orderly entered. "Captain Brewster wants you, Sir, for a moment in his hut."

Ransom nodded casually. "All right, Jones." The Orderly saluted and closed

the door. Ransom's breath came in quick, short jerks. Lighting another cigarette he opened the door and strolled out into the night. Brewster was alone, and smiled when Ransom entered. "I say, old thing, I'm awfully sorry, but I've got to go to O—— to-morrow, and I want you to lead that photographic stunt for me."

Ransom blew out a cloud of smoke and nodded, "Right, Brewster, what time?"

The Flight Commander plunged into details and explanations. "You feel all right, Old Bean, don't you?" he said as Ransom was leaving. Ransom laughed. "Rather—fit as Hell." . . .

. . . . . .

"Six o'clock, sir, and a fine morning." The Orderly drew aside the blind and let

in a stream of sunshine. Ransom opened tired eyes with a feeling of stifling oppression and got slowly out of bed. He dressed and looked out of the window. The sky was clear but over the salient a thick black pall seemed to hang like a curtain shutting out the hideous drama of a ceaseless War.

He drank the cup of steaming tea that his servant had brought, and taking his flying cap and goggles walked slowly across the aerodrome. Four machines were drawn out in front of the sheds, while mechanics busied themselves with finishing taps and adjustments.

One by one the seven other aviators came across and gathered round Ransom. "It's still pretty dud over the salient." Ransom nodded.

"Well, wait a bit." Eight o'clock

came and the curtain began to lift as the sun got higher. Ransom was walking up and down the tarmac, kicking stones in front of him. Archie began to get busy, and balloons slowly rose till their heads nodded against the low-drifting clouds.

Ransom's heart was beating fast. It was now or never. With a jerk he dropped his cigarette and climbed into his machine.

In the office the Major, pencil in hand, was listening to the Wing Adjutant attempting to say something through the deafening rattles, buzzes, sighs and moans that accompany one's voice through the telephone. "Hullo, yes, Dickson, Nottingham, and Ransom to be transferred to Home Establishment on the 22nd. Right. . . ."

Four machines in perfect formation

cautiously crossed the trenches. A strong west wind was blowing and, although Archie saw them well—he observed the direction of the wind and maintained a discreet silence, waiting for the return journey, when they would come struggling against the wind to form a perfect target. Such is Archie's little subterfuge.

He pretends when he sees you coming that many failures have made him sulky and that he's not even going to try for you, and thus he fancies the innocent young aviator is lured far over the line, but when the machine turns to go home against an adverse wind, Archie springs to life with many a "crump" and snarl. The four machines quickly found their objective and took their souvenirs. Perfectly they turned together and crump,

crump, crump banged the Archie amongst them. Four observers, their guns ready, scanned the blue for cross-marked enemies. Four pilots, their faith in their engines, divided their time between hasty looks at their instruments and rapid glances around the sky. Ransom crouching in his machine, started hopelessly at every "crump"; his eyes were on the distant trenches, and he cursed the strong west wind. His observer, Robin, glanced calmly round the sky with the air of one who commands the situation and is satisfied with the world in general. Part of the time he spent in jocular messages to which Ransom nodded, but paid no attention. "Crump-clang," the machine reeled from the shock, hesitated and plunged forward again. Ransom crouched lower and peered round for the three other

machines. Two were following close behind. One rather lagged. Suddenly Archie stopped and Robin looking up, saw away above them an enormous number of machines, glittering white in the sun. He caught his breath. "Gawd, the circus!" he whispered and steadied his gun.

Ransom with a rapid glance over his shoulder saw them too. Quickly raising the Very pistol, he fired a light.

The whole formation turned and as they turned, nine of the enemy machines dived. Staccato cracks tore splinters round them and ripped jagged holes along their fabric. The formation soon broke up and individual fighting started. Ransom fired his forward gun straight into the gleaming belly of a black-crossed machine banking before him.

The bullets were flashing straight into it, and emotionless he saw it side-slip and spin quickly down. Crack, crack, crack. The bullets tore and whipped about him, splashing the wood around his eyes.

Robin behind was firing in rapid bursts, cool-handed and steady. From the corner of his eye Ransom saw two machines flashing down in flames and smoke. Pulling the machine round he side-slipped, spun her down 1,000 feet, pulled her out again and quickly looked around.

Far away he saw a group of machines hastening back to Hunland, but of the other three of his formation he saw nothing. He looked behind. Robin was quietly tying bandages round his wrist, his face beneath his goggles rather white.

Half an hour later—they were on the aerodrome. Two of the other three

machines were there and one of the observers lay dying in the medical hut. Ransom hastened to the office to make his report.

The Major looked up with a relieved expression when he entered. "I heard about your scrap, Ransom, from an R.E. 8. Did you see poor old Dickson shot down?" Ransom, his face white and his hand tightening and untightening convulsively, spoke slowly. "I think I must have seen him spinning down on the top of a Hun, but I couldn't be sure, sir. I think we got two altogether. Yes, sir, it was the circus."

The Major suddenly looked up. "By the way, Ransom, you've to go home to-morrow."

Ransom swayed slightly, saluted, and walked out unsteadily from the office.

## *VI.—A Daily Round*

## *A Daily Round*

"NICE bright flying day, sir." Jimmy rolled over, opened his eyes and looked with much venom at his servant. It was just seven, and, as Jimmy's servant had remarked, it was a perfect Spring morning, clear and frosty and the sky a stretch of unbroken blue. Jimmy got out of bed yawning, and put his two shivering legs into a large pair of comforting fleece-lined thigh boots, and started the difficult process of shaving on a cold day with a tender skin and lukewarm water. "Wish I was in the Navy," he sighed, as a small red streak by his chin denoted that the daily loss of blood had started—and he looked with envy at the photograph of

his naval brother who was adorned with a young and promising beard. Presently the door opened and Nichol, his observer, entered whistling. "By Jove, what a ghastly fug in here!" Jimmy murmured a protest.

Nichol advanced, and taking a cigarette from Jimmy's box sat down heavily on the bed. "Are you aware, my lad, that we are indulging in the so-called pastime of air-fighting at 8.30 Ack-Emma, and it's now 7.45." Jimmy *was* aware, and said so forcibly. At 8.15 they were both on the Aerodrome. All the machines were out before the Sheds, and one with a loud increasing roar was just skimming along the grass "taking off." Far away to the East half-a-dozen Observation balloons hung motionless, and still further a small machine hurried along, pursued by the

inevitable little black bursts of Archie apparently absorbed in a "shoot." On the way to their shed Jimmy and Nichol met two others laden with maps, and arguing violently as to the individual merits of high-explosive Archie over shrapnel. Jimmy frowned at them. "For Gawd's sake stop talking hot air, my lads, and don't foul the beautiful morning." The two laughed, and retorted with an expressive but impolite repartee. At one o'clock the mess was full of people discussing the morning's work, and the continuation of it in the afternoon.

Jimmy and Nichol had succeeded beyond their wildest hopes, and had removed two Hun batteries. There were very few Huns about, and only lack of petrol and hunger had stayed them from demolishing a third. At two o'clock the frequent roar of engines,

gradually fading away in the distance, again left the Aerodrome nearly empty.

One machine was left. In it Jimmy was moaning "Contact" for the umpteenth time, and Nichol in the back seat was languidly watching a succession of perspiring mechanics vainly endeavouring to start the engine.

The Major suddenly appeared. "Hullo, not off yet?" Jimmy shouted dismally, "No, sir, the engine's dud—she was missing a bit this morning." The Major took hold of the propeller and shouted "Contact!"

"Contact!" echoed Jimmy. A spluttering roar, which gradually settled to a steady drone, and they were away bounding over the grass towards the East. The Major often managed to succeed when others failed. At half-past five the light

started to fade, and away in the West great banks of rain clouds were gathering. Most of the machines were back, and were being pushed into their sheds by attendant mechanics hot of face and language. Only two were still "up." At six-fifteen the light was getting dim, and far away a distant drone brought the mechanics out to gaze up into the violet sky. "That's Captain Renfel," said one mechanic. "Aye, it's time that Mester James was doon," said Jimmy's rigger. In the office the Major was listening to a multitude of ghostly voices, cracks and buzzes jambing the telephone. "Hullo, hullo, is that the Wireless? Has Mr. James finished his shoot?" A pause. "Yes, sir, he gave the signal at 5.30." The Major wrinkled his forehead. "Thank you." Picking up a Very pistol he went out on to the

Aerodrome, fired a light up into the falling night, and looked away towards the East. Again he fired and listened. Far away a little light high up in the sky burst and fell in a shower of stars. Ten minutes later Jimmy and Nichol were explaining exactly how they had taken the wrong turning and lost their way, and how they had succeeded once again in "putting the wind up" a Hun battery and had spoilt three of their guns. Away in the distance the guns flashed and rumbled, and from the Mess came the sound of many people all talking at once. "Come on old Bean and change," said Jimmy, taking his Observer's arm. The daily round was done.

## *VII.*—" 365 "

## " 365 "

"It's becoming positively childish," said the Major, as a small aviator passed the window with a large silver mascot dangling from his identity bracelet, and turning with a frown to an orderly told him that he wanted to see Mr. McGuy, then he sat down at his table and prepared for an offensive. Ten minutes later McGuy came out of the office looking worried, and the bracelet on his wrist was conspicuous by the absence of ornament. McGuy looked unhappy for the greater part of the evening, and before going to bed unburdened his sorrowful soul to Jimmy. "It's too childish for words," he said, unconsciously reiterating the Major's

words. "She only sent it to me two days ago—anyway, I'm going to carry it with me to-morrow." Words failed him, and Jimmy looked appropriately sympathetic. McGuy, with an angry glance at the sky, retired to his hut to brood in solitude over the foibles of superior officers.

Before getting into bed he placed with tender care two small objects on the table by his bed. One was a silver bulldog with enormous bulging eyes and a large smile; the other was a locket. Before turning out the light he opened the latter and looked for a few moments at the photograph within, and turning over on his side nestled his head in the pillow and was soon asleep. McGuy was just eighteen and very young for his age—or was he old? One never quite knew.

The following morning a breathless

Flight Commander shattered an extraordinarily satisfactory dream of a very long leave, in which a wealthy and altruistic uncle, a pretty girl, and himself were the principal characters. " I say, McGuy, the Flight Sergeant tells me your engine must come out, they tried to patch it up, but I'm afraid it's had its day—you'd better take 365." McGuy awoke and opened his mouth wide. " Oh I say, Brewster, isn't there another machine ? You know 365 is the unluckiest in the Squadron." The Flight Commander laughed. " 365 is all right, it's only the people who can't fly that give it its bad reputation." McGuy sighed. " Right—Brewster." At ten o'clock that morning McGuy and his Observer sat in No. 365 —the last machine on the aerodrome. The Observer felt uncomfortable, a d

missed the "gadgets" which he had fixed all round him in his own machine. McGuy, with a resigned expression, was shouting "Contact!" for the eighth time. Eventually the engine started, and McGuy watched the rev-counter with an unexpectant eye; however, when he opened out the engine he seemed surprised, and after a moment or two waved his right hand. "The chocs" were pulled away from the wheels, and two mechanics, their hair waving in the draught from the propeller, lifted the tail and turned the machine. Over the lines—the engine was going well, and McGuy became interested in the shoot. He watched the little white bursts creeping round and nearer the target, while the Observer, his right hand on the wireless key and a pencil in the left, fixed his eyes on

the wood and guided the bursting shells. Nearer and nearer the shells crept, until they were bursting on the target. It was just at this point that the engine, without the faintest splutter, stopped.

The Observer signalled down to the battery to continue to fire in their own time, and sat back patiently in his seat. McGuy turned the nose of the machine towards home and glided softly along—trying everything he knew to coax the engine back to life again. They were dropping rapidly, and the Observer began to wind up the aerial. McGuy swore. They were well over the line, but only 500 feet up, and had eight miles to go to get to the nearest aerodrome. He rapidly unbuckled his belt; then remembering that he had heard someone say it was wiser to crash with one's belt buckled,

he quickly did it up again. His Observer was sitting back in his seat quietly watching the ground beneath growing rapidly nearer. McGuy, with a quick look, spotted a fairly large field which seemed clear of the inevitable hop-poles, and S— turned steeply down. His Observer took off his goggles, thrust them in his pocket, and cautiously held on to the sides of the machine.

With a long-drawn swish and a whistle they glided over the head of an astonished peasant—a slight bump—another—and McGuy suddenly saw a small deep ditch in front.

He pulled the joy stick feverishly in an attempt to "Jump it." There was a sudden jolt, and the universe seemed to meet and mingle in a dizzy crash !

The next moment McGuy found himself

crouching in an uncomfortable attitude upside down in a very confined space—a smell of hot oil around him, and a bruise growing painfully and rapidly into an enormous bump.

He crawled out—simultaneously with the dejected figure of his Observer. They met on all fours, and looked pathetically at each other. " Damn and blast," said McGuy, and he glanced down at his bracelet bereft of ornament. " Confound it," he said, adding other expressive and comforting words—" I knew I'd forget the blasted thing ! "

## *VIII.—"Hot Air Gaps"*

## "*Hot Air Gaps*"

Two o'clock in the afternoon, and the sky still covered by low heavy clouds. In the Mess hut everything was peaceful; in ten large arm-chairs ten youthful-looking aviators were sleeping off an after-lunch coma. Every face suggested satisfaction, every attitude repose—not a sound broke the stillness of a perfectly dud day. The door opened and an Orderly entered, hesitated and coughed noisily.

"Mr. Morelux, sir." Ten youthful pilots stirred uneasily in their sleep. One yawned and opened his eyes. The Orderly saluted. "Mr. Morelux, you're wanted at once at the office." Morelux, a fair-haired youth with a shamefully young face,

leaped to his feet, strode anxiously to the window and inspected the sky. The result appeared to make him anxious. "Lord, it's getting fine," he murmured in a sepulchral tone. These few words, which under ordinary circumstances would have gladdened the hearts of most people, produced the most extraordinary commotion in this particular mess room. The nine aviators instantly woke up, sprang to their feet, hurling remarks which were not endearing at the pilot who had broken their slumber so unfeelingly. "Rot, liar. Good God, it's true," burst in an unanimous howl from nine throats. "There are some more clouds coming up over there," remarked an optimist at another window. Instantly the crowd surged to the optimist's window and peered up anxiously. "Well, our tea at H—— is washed out anyhow," wailed

three pilots, whose combined ages couldn't have amounted to more than 57.

As Morelux seized his hat and strode to the door an Orderly entered. " All Officers wanted at once at the office, sir." Archant, the Squadron lunatic, started to give an imitation of a dog objecting to a piano solo, but was submerged by the combined rush for the door.

In the office the Major stood by his table, a telephone glued to his ear, a pencil in one hand, a list of targets in the other and a large map before him on the table. His face always wore an anxious look.

The three Flight Commanders with their flying coats on were bending over the map on the table muttering incoherently.

As Morelux entered the Major was talking mysteriously down the telephone, "Pip one Ack two and Don four. Yes, it's

rather far over, but we'll do it if we can."

Morelux experienced that quaint sinking sensation and crept behind a large map box. "Don four," he murmured to himself. "Lord, why not do a shoot on Berlin while we're about it?" The next moment the remainder of the Squadron, roused from their couches by breathless Orderlies, dashed in, and the office at once became a seething mass of people in flying coats, maps and photographs. All spoke quickly of strange things. "We'll go up to Pip, then follow down to Ack five, you start taking them there. Yes, get four OKs., then we'll wait about half an hour after 6.0, and if they're firing all right we'll push off." "Where's Slow?" wailed a dark curly-headed lad. "Where's my perfectly well-formed Observer, Slow?

Slow?" The door opened and Slow entered laden with a young clothes' shop and five maps, which he proceeded to scatter in different parts of the office, much to the Adjutant's disgust. Morelux and his Observer, a remarkably tall, thin fellow with perfectly brushed hair, whose sobriquet was a "Stream-line," was bending over a map, giving each other last injunctions, "And don't forget," Morelux was saying, "if you see a Hun, don't go on with your shoot as you did last time; give me two hits on the head, and we'll give him Hades."

Outside the sky was fairly clear, and the sun was shining in an anæmic fashion through a faint mist on the machines drawn out in front of the sheds. Mechanics were hurriedly looking over the cameras and aerials, and giving last

taps and twists to engines. In ten minutes all the aviators were in their machines. Morelux, whose flying coat, sweater, and various other protections against the cold made him look like an elderly gentleman in the last stage of dropsy, climbed into the machine.

"Petrol on, switch off, suck in!" The mechanic turned the propeller round, and the engine sighed like some huge animal waking up.

"Contact!" shouted the Ack-Emma. Morelux looked back over his shoulder. "All right, Jimmy." "All right," echoed his Observer. The Pilot pulled down his goggles. "Contact!" The mechanic gave the propeller a lusty heave, and with a roar the engine started. Morelux looked at his rev-counter all serene, and throttling down the machine

was about to "taxi" out, when an Orderly ran out. " Wash out, sir," he screamed. Morelux throttled down until the propeller was just ticking over. " What's that ? " " Wash out, sir," repeated the Orderly; shouting, " The Major says it's not good enough." Jimmy looked up at the sky. The gap had gone, and again the sky was covered with low, heavy, fast flying clouds. He switched off, and made a curious signal to his Observer.

He turned both his thumbs up. " Come on, Jimmy." And the mechanic pushed the machine back into the shed, and on their faces they wore large smiles.

## *IX.—An Orderly-Dog's Day*

## *An Orderly-Dog's Day*

JIMMY, having successfully turned out the guard, was sitting in a pair of pink pyjamas on his bed warming his feet by the stove, when someone knocked loudly at the door. "Come in," shouted Jimmy, stifling a yawn. A Corporal entered and saluted. "There's a machine, sir, been firing lights over the aerodrome. It went away, and now it's coming back, sir. Had we better fire some lights?" Jimmy jumped off the bed and started to pull on a pair of thigh boots over his pyjamas, muttering imprecations against over-zealous and tactless bomb-droppers. "Poop off some lights, Corporal, and light the flares." The Corporal saluted,

"Very good, sir," and ran off. Jimmy, yawning loudly, slipped on a heavy flying coat and opened the door. A frosty wind met him, and made him look reluctantly back at the warm little stove in the hut. "Curse these night-flying idiots," he said unfeelingly, and seizing an electric torch ran along the road towards the aerodrome. Except for the occasional pop of the Very pistol, the night was very still. A few stars twinkled dimly through the cold mist which hung in heavy shrouds around the trees and ditches. The Corporal and two other men were standing by the guard hut staring up into the night, and several dim figures in the middle of the aerodrome were arranging the flickering flares.

Jimmy ran up to the Corporal, "Seen any more lights, Corporal?" The Corporal pointed away to the East—a tiny ball

appeared high up in the gloom, fell in a little red streak, and faded in a burst of stars. "There she is, sir." Jimmy took the pistol from the Corporal and pulled the trigger. A light shot up, burst, and fell in a shower of stars. They could hear the machine now, the regular tick-a-tack, tick-a-tack, accompanied by a low drone was getting louder and louder—the little group on the aerodrome stared up, trying to pierce the deep black gloom.

Suddenly the drone ceased and gave place to the musical whine of the wind through wires. "She's coming down all right," said Jimmy, "it's a Fe I think," and ran out on to the aerodrome. The whining note got softer and nearer as the machine "S"—turned and gradually slowed preparatory to landing. All of a sudden, like a grey ghost, it shot out of the

darkness with a whistle and bumped softly to a standstill. Jimmy ran up to it, and as he got near the pilot shouted to him, "Wo bin Ich?" "I beg your pardon," said Jimmy politely. A stream of German oaths polluted the night, and Jimmy's heart for a moment ceased to function. He was up against the machine, and quickly recognised one of Germany's latest scouts. The pilot fumbled in his pocket for something, but Jimmy was quicker. "Put your damned hands up," he yelled excitedly, pointing the pistol a foot away from the pilot's nose. "Leave your pocket alone, and get out."

The pilot looked for a moment down at the boyish determined face, and at the pistol, and with a slight shrug of his shoulders climbed out and removed his flying cap. The guard were by this time stand-

ing round the two—fingering their rifles dangerously. Jimmy waved them aside, and advancing towards the Hun, who as far as he could see in the gloom was a tall, rather heavy sort of individual, grasped and shook his astonished hand. Jimmy never quite understood what prompted him to do this—probably because he was so relieved to find that the Hun "came quietly," so to speak. Half an hour later Jimmy was lying on his bed, while eighteen pilots in various stages of négligé were trying to get into the hut, which measured six feet by ten. Every one was talking at once, except Jimmy, who sipped a large whisky and soda slowly and very self-consciously.

## *X.—Ack-Emma*

## *Ack-Emma*

(A.M., *i.e.* Air Mechanic)

THOMSON was very Scotch. His accent was Scotch, his conscience was Scotch, his hair was red, and his simplicity child-like. This is all that anyone could discover about Thomson ; he kept very much to himself. His duty was to keep Morelux's engine in form, and his sole ambition seemed to be to prevent the engine from letting Morelux down, from which it may be seen that Thomson was considerably devoted to Morelux, besides having a strong sense of duty.

Thomson looked upon the engine as a live thing, and sometimes on a cold morning when it sighed and coughed but

refused to start, Thomson would frown at it with a worried look, and dope it with petrol as if he were dosing a sick child with medicine.

Morelux hardly needed to test the revolutions before starting off on a job. He would climb in, Stilter would nonchalantly take his place in the back seat. "Contact, sir?" Thomson would say, patting the prop. "Contact!" echoed Morelux; then with a roar they'd be off. Thomson would stand like a statue, his hand shading his eyes, watching the machine grow smaller and smaller until it disappeared into the morning mist, and then when it could be seen no more he would turn towards the shed with a worried look, and busy himself savagely until the faint drone high overhead brought him running out again. With the instinct

bred of long practise, he could recognise his own machine when other Ack-Emmas could barely tell the species.

And then when Morelux returned again to the aerodrome, Thomson, his worried look gone, would run out swiftly and steady the machine back to the sheds. When Morelux climbed out of the machine, Thomson would be waiting for him. "Weel, surr," Thomson would query, well knowing what the answer would be. Morelux would smile, "Oh, she went fine, Thomson."

Then one day something happened; Morelux had been up three and a-half hours, and still there was no sign of him. Thomson stood outside the shed, alternately biting his nails and glancing back towards the office.

The Flight Commander appeared,

"Mr. Morelux not back yet, Thomson?" Thomson shook his head slowly. "No, surr," and continued to scan the sky, which was slowly turning violet in the twilight. Seven o'clock, it was almost dark. Very lights would suddenly pop, race up in long yellow lines, and burst into a shower of light. At half-past seven Thomson had no nails left on his right hand, and his eyes were misty. "I'm thinking they'll be doon," he said, turning with a look of despair to the Flight Sergeant as if the thought had only just struck him. "Is Flight Sergeant Jones there?" A breathless Orderly dashed up and thrust a piece of yellow paper into the Flight's hand. Jones looked at it, and, passing it on to Thomson, ran off to the transport shed. On the paper was written, "No. 635 forced landing half mile N.

of ——. Pilot and Observer unhurt; under-carriage and prop. broken; take engineman and rigger and get there as soon as possible. Tell Mr. Morelux he is not to fly back to-night. O.C., Umpteen Squadron."

Thomson's breath whistled out in a long pent-up sigh of relief. "Ha'e got a gasper, laddie!" he said, turning to the rigger.

# *XI.—Bumps*

## *Bumps*

"Malbrouck s' en va" en air.
"Ne sait quand il revient."

"ARE you ready, Parker?" said the General with a faint note of regret, as he surveyed the debris of an immodest repast.

The A.D.C. at once busied himself with cap, wraps and stick. "Is the car ready, Parker?" "Yes, sir." "You know, Parker," continued the General facetiously, "it may be the last time we'll have the opportunity of using it." Parker gave a harsh duty laugh and shuddered involuntarily. The General, temporarily rejuvenated by the Spring air, had decided to experience his first flight. A few minutes later the heavy car glided softly to a throbbing standstill

on the edge of a large aerodrome. "Good morning, Major," said the General, stepping heavily out of the car on to the toe of the A.D.C., who winced but maintained a tactful silence.

The Squadron Commander raised his hand to his flying cap, and conducted the General slowly and reverently round the sheds. Presently they came to a machine which was swaying slightly to the breeze —mechanics busy round the engine. "Would you care to go up now, sir, or will you wait a bit?"

"Yes, yes, quite ready." "Right, sir," said the Major, handing him a flying cap and a pair of goggles. "Thank ye—thank ye," said the General, attempting to put the cap on upside down. "Yes, yes, of course. Let's see now, how do we get in? Eh?"

Two mechanics gently raised him into the seat. "Dear me," said the General, "what a very confined space!" "Contact!" shouted the Major. The engine spluttered and roared, and a farewell epigram, which the General had been thinking out for the last twelve hours, was torn from his breathless lips and hurled away by the whistling draught. "Flick!" —away went the General's goggles. "Here, stop—Hi!" The General thumped the Major's broad back, the engine was throttled down to a murmur, and a panting orderly ran up with the goggles. "Should I not—" started the General, but again the engine roared out, and the screaming wind killed the epigram before it was born. Fifteen minutes later the machine landed, and the General—a clutching figure in the back seat—was assisted out.

"Very nice—very nice indeed—most enjoyable. Thanks very much, Major —— Yes—afraid I must be going. Good-bye." The door of the car slammed, and the Major raised his hand to the salute. For several minutes the General was very quiet, and the A.D.C. glanced at him out the corner of a watery eye. "Stop the car," said the General suddenly. The A.D.C. with a fluttering heart tapped the window. The General climbed unsteadily out and walked slowly down the road, his head bowed on the rows of coloured ribbons across his breast. "Damn!" said the General, stopping. "Damn!" he said, as he was sick again.

## *XII.—Crashes and Landings*

## *Crashes and Landings*

THEY may be amusing, they may be serious, or they may merely be annoying. For instance, a pilot enters the ante-room on some wet and windy day and remarks casually as he picks up the morning paper, "Archant's just run into the bomb store again." Few people raise their heads from their papers—it's probably such a common occurrence that it's ceased to be amusing, but to Archant's rigger and fitter it's more than annoying—they lead a dog's life.

Then again, owing to the fact that a couple of mechanics are being re-rigged, a new pilot borrows your machine and looks for worms by flying straight into the ground! It's very trying.

There are few things so interesting as watching a machine land. The worse the day the more interesting it becomes.

I have seen a machine make as many as seven attempts to land on a windy day, only to turn "ack. tock." (absolutely turtle) on the eighth. Sometimes one sits quietly in the ante-room—as quietly as one can sit with a gramophone asking in loud and raucous tones "if you've seen the ducks go by," with two couples dancing a frenzied fox-trot, and a third couple emulating Hackenschmidt and Madrali in a corner —with four or five other people behaving like a football scrum in another corner. I say one is sitting quietly in the ante-room when the door bursts open and a dishevelled officer dashes in with, "I say, there's an S—— coming down," and disappears as violently as he appeared.

Instantly the ante-room becomes a scene of indescribable confusion, and in thirty seconds only about two very languid and blasé aviators remain. The crowd surges out on to the aerodrome, and in almost breathless silence watch the landing.

If it's a good one the air is filled with long-drawn ohs and ahs—if it's a bad one, and he crashes or carries away the office, the abuse is quite horrible to listen to (especially from those who happen to be in the office at the time), and the crowd advances either to inspect the new machine or the remains of it as the case may be——or disperse to the ante-room to criticize the landing or continue the fox trot. A new pilot always affords a lot of interest, and more often than not a good deal of amusement, on his first flight in a strange squadron. Naturally he is intent on making

a favourable impression on the other pilots; who very often make him slightly nervous—the results sometimes being rather unsatisfactory so far as the new pilot is concerned. There is something very attractive about a perfect landing—to see the machine humming far above the aerodrome, the roar suddenly ceasing as it glides almost silently down in a slow steady spiral to the soft music of the wind through the wires, and in one long swoop glides down and skims along the ground until the wheels gently touch the grass, and with a few tiny bumps slows down and stops. A bad landing is not so attractive. The machine spirals down, and skims along about ten feet above the ground until it gradually slows down, and after a series of gigantic bumps and crashes —resembling a giant grasshopper—it

comes to rest in a maimed condition, unable very often to pursue the uneven tenor of its way to the sheds, where it has to be ignominiously assisted back by many frowning and cursing mechanics. Sometimes it is merely picked up in pieces. The story of the great aviator who was expected at a certain aerodrome at a certain time is an old one. At two o'clock a hum was heard high above the clouds. The contents of the ante-room emptied itself upon the aerodrome to watch the arrival.

Slowly and well he spiralled down, executing a few awe-inspiring stunts on the way, and until he was about a hundred feet up the spectators stood quietly in silent admiration, and then it suddenly became obvious the great man was intent on landing down-wind, and there was a good

deal blowing at the time. A few muttered and well-chosen imprecations from the Major were the only audible remarks from the audience. The machine (although the engine had been switched off) had a good deal of speed, and with the assistance of the wind flew straight through a distant hangar, to the surprise and disgust of a couple of mechanics who were talking scandal within. The hangar was a canvas one, but unfortunately there was a brick wall on the other side, and the remnants that were picked up were about two baskets full. Another story with a moral, which also has its element of humour, is that of another great man who realising that flying is the simplest means of travel (if one can fly), and having to proceed to a large aerodrome some miles off to keep an engagement, thought that he would

borrow a machine—not having one of his own handy. Owing to his exalted position he succeeded in achieving his ambition, and having had the fundamental principles explained to him he started off. Two hours later the temporary owner of the machine, having had no news of the arrival of the great man, telephoned to the aerodrome. "Well," was the answer, "a machine was piled up on the aerodrome about half an hour ago, and a staff officer stepped out of the debris—is that your man?"

It was. The great man now keeps his engagements in a well-appointed Limousine.

# *XIII.—Salvage*

## *Salvage*

"HULLO—Hullo—yes—who is it?"

The Major reached for a pencil and listened to the faint sighs and moans down the wire. A ghostly voice started speaking. "Hullo. Is that you, Major? Well, No. 635 of your Squadron is down at Ack 2.5. Yes, near Dickebush lake —yes—crashed badly, pilot killed—will you send up there—right—I say, who was the pilot?"

The Major opened a book and ran his finger down the machines "up"—he came to No. 635 and stopped. For a moment he looked out of the window with unseeing and tired eyes, then turned wearily to the telephone. "Hullo—it's

Jimmy I'm afraid." The Wing Adjutant at the other end of the wire frowned. "Oh, I'm damn sorry." He had been dining with the Squadron the night before, and it was hard to realise that the dark curly-headed boy who had played the piano and sung and kept them laughing well into the night was dead. He sighed, and turned again to the pile of papers which grew momentarily on his desk.

The Major sat for a moment at his table and stared at the book. "No. 635, 2nd Lieut. James—— Patrol—left 5.45." He stared at the last gap, "returned"; which would never be filled in. "Oh, my God!" He got up, and hastily pushing a map into his pocket strode out to the transport shed; on the way he met the senior Flight Commander. "Is every one back, Jeffrey?" "Yes, sir; all except 635."

The Major stopped and looked away over the aerodrome. "635 has crashed." Jeffrey looked anxious. "Jimmy isn't hurt, is he, sir?" "I'm afraid he's killed. I'm just going up there. Will you carry on."

The Flight Commander saluted and turned slowly away. Three-quarters of an hour later the car drew up at the foot of a small hill by a shattered house. All around the guns were roaring and stabbing the twilight with great flashes of yellow light. The Major got out and entered a small cottage—one of the three that were more or less intact in the village. On the door was chalked "Umpteen Bde. Hqrs., Umpteen Division." He pushed the door open, and found a worried looking Staff-Captain wearing out pencils on masses of papers. He looked up when

the Major entered. "Oh, yes. Your machine is at the end of Tottenham Court Road in the front line trenches. Yes. It was shot down about an hour ago. They got the pilot out, but I'm afraid there's nothing left of the machine. You see it caught fire, and the Huns have been shelling for an hour what the fire left."

The Major turned. "Thanks very much. I'll go up there. Can you let me have a guide ?"

A small perspiring Private was produced, and together they set off down through the mud and slush of the interminable trenches. Presently they came upon a large sign-board, which said in abrupt terms that Tottenham Court Road was to the left. By the board two officers were smoking. One of them turned when the

Major appeared. "Have you come after that machine, sir?" "Well, we've sent back one of the guns and a few other things, and the body's here. Yes, he was shot, I think. Three Huns came at him out of a cloud, and I think some damned unlucky shot must have got him first go. He simply fluttered down like a leaf." The Major nodded and entered a dark little dug-out; on a form was a figure covered with a blanket.

He lifted one end and looked for a moment on the calm boyish face, with the curly dark hair round the forehead.

The Major bent down, and lifting him up laid him tenderly on the stretcher.

An officer came up to him and placed a small package in his hand—the "articles of intrinsic value"—as the Authorities have it—which would be sent to a

heart-broken mother. Two mechanics entered and lifted the stretcher, and the Major slowly led the way back to his car.

## *XIV.—Occasions*

## *Occasions*

"AND we had a most priceless occasion." "Stop!" I said, pushing Jimmy into an armchair. "Ever since you returned from France your conversation has been rendered almost incoherent by strange words. Explain at once what you mean by an 'occasion'?" Jimmy smiled, lit a cigarette, and started off like this :—

"There are times in the life of a pilot when flying becomes impossible on account of "Dud" weather; there are times, I repeat, when melancholy creeps up and throws her arms about him, enveloping him in black despair. This may be due to many reasons; it may be indigestion; it may be the toot of a motor horn,

conjuring up visions of Piccadilly seething with life and amusement, and that leave seems as far off as ever; or it may be the beginning of a cold in the head.

"Anyway, he hates life with an enormous H, and makes himself a nuisance to everybody and a trial to himself. The sound of a cheery laugh acts like an incentive to murder. These are the times when an "occasion" is the only cure. It may strike someone well up in history that to-day is the anniversary of the battle of Waterloo; it may be somebody's birthday; it may be a full moon, or perhaps someone has been promoted (Jimmy stopped a moment and gazed fondly at six very new stars). One needn't look far to find a fairly substantial reason to mark the particular night with an occasion. Of course it isn't really necessary to

have a reason at all; the mere fact that it's raining and cold, and that everyone is rather low is sufficient, but a reason always gives an added zest to the thing and a subject for the after-dinner speeches."

"The procedure is as follow:—

"First of all the O.C. drinks, and casts a knowing eye over his bottles. The result may be unsatisfactory. In this case he seizes the list of drink bills unpaid, and rushes round with a bloodshot look in his eye for the people whose instinct makes them disappear with miraculous quickness when they see the ominous figure approaching."

"The Mess President, on being informed that an 'occasion' is necessary, proceeds to the kitchen with a much-soiled edition of Mrs. Beeton under his arm.

"He probably suggests a very récherché

dinner, while the cook, with the smile of the experienced, stands mute and horribly inglorious by his side. As he goes out of the kitchen he will probably hear subdued laughter and the words, 'Machonachie—tinned pears.' On the other hand, if the cook has half a drop of French blood in his veins, he will very likely produce a very good imitation of the récherché dinner ordered by the P.M.C. But cooks vary so much."

Half an hour before Mess the ante-room would be filled with people agog with anticipation; in a corner of the room a man with upturned sleeves would be juggling with a great many bottles, finally finishing by performing an acrobatic feat with a cocktail shaker, while a crowd of people stand round him breathless with admiration and expectation. Five

minutes before Mess is announced, the ante-room buzzes with frivolous conversation and merry laughter, and the most trivial incident assumes quite a humorous aspect.

"When the meal is over, the port passed round and the cigarettes alight, the Major pushes back his chair and rises. If the Major is very popular the cheering and rattle of knives, clapping of hands and stamping of feet goes on for quite a long time. In his speech he probably touches on some of the doings of the Squadron, and if someone has been promoted, makes the usual congratulatory remarks, and proposes the toast. The remainder of the Squadron then rise, drink the toast, and make the object of the toast thoroughly uncomfortable by telling him in song that he is a jolly good

fellow. The remainder of the evening is passed in song and dance. Possibly at an early hour someone happens to get outside; the sky is clear and ablaze with a thousand stars, and in the East Very lights pop up and fade slowly away. It's not unlikely that this same person has *not* to get up for an early shoot. He will then return to the mess with a big smile, and impart his disquieting news to those who *have* to get up early, and he will have to be agile if he escapes the shower of missiles which follow him out of the door. However, even such news as this, although it probably brings the Squadron outside to gaze up at the stars and calculate the direction of the wind and the possibilities of the clouds, fails to stop the chuckles of the most pessimistic aviator. Finally, at an early hour, the

Squadron part and go chuckling and laughing to their respective huts. It requires so little to make one laugh after an 'occasion.'"

Jimmy stopped and gazed thoughtfully at the blue spirals of smoke curling up from the cigarette.

## *XV.—Lost*

## *Lost*

It was about twelve o'clock, and the day had been one of those annoying ones that fortunately don't come very often.

There are three distinct types of day to the aviator in war-time—a fine flying day, when the air is fine and crisp, the sky blue, and just a faint misty haze to upset Archie ; the next type is the Dud day, when the sky is grey with dark, thick, hanging rain clouds, and you can scarcely see across the aerodrome ; the last type is the day which is neither the one nor the other, great banks of misty clouds come racing across the sky, loose their shower of rain and scurry on, the sun struggles out, the sky gets blue, and then just as one

is settled in the machine great bleak clouds and mist come racing up, obscuring everything with a heavy, drenching shower, and you get wearily out, crawl back to the Mess hut and wait for the next gap in the clouds. It was one of these last days that tinged Morelux's hair with white —at least Morelux said so. Most of the Squadron had been engaged all the morning in the absorbing task of ousting rats, with the aid of Very lights and a small brown dog, from beneath the Mess hut.

Archant, the Squadron lunatic, was just giving his world-famed imitation of Buffalo Bill stalking a buffalo (the much harried rat in this instance was unconsciously the buffalo), when the inevitable Orderly appeared.

"Mr. Morelux, sir, you're wanted at the office." The rat hunt continued, and

Morelux, with a glance at the sky, hurried along to the office.

In the office he found the Major, his Flight Commander, and his Observer. The Major turned as he came in. "Oh, Morelux, I think you might try Ack 1; it's a good target, and only just over the trenches. Good God, what's that?" The Major stopped, outside the voices of many people, raised in triumph, got louder and louder. First of all a rat, dishevelled, and in the last stage of exhaustion staggered past the window, the wild look of the hunted in his eye. Then came a small brown mongrel, yelping and screaming, and a few yards behind come the Squadron lunatic in an enormous pair of thigh boots, a dirty tunic, in one hand a light and in the other a large stick, shouting incoherent words of encouragement

to anybody who came in sight. Then in various strange costumes, all shouting frantically, the rest of the Squadron swept by.

The Major turned with a smile. "Well, will you push up as soon as you can, Morelux? I've warned the battery." Morelux saluted, and turned to his Observer. "Got the photo, Stilter?"

Stilter, always slow, but always accurate, smiled slowly and nodded.

Outside they met Archant exhausted, but triumphant. "Going up, Morelux?"

Morelux nodded and glanced up at the sky, which was getting clearer overhead, but darkening in the West.

Archant pulled out a noisily-coloured handkerchief and burst into theatrical tears—"Good-bye-e!"—and held out a trembling hand. Morelux laughed shortly,

and arm-in-arm with his Observer walked quickly over to "A" flight sheds, where his machine was waiting for him, with its three grimy satellites standing round it. Ten minutes later, "Artillery, sir?" Stilter nodded languidly to the mechanic. "Contact, sir?" queried the mechanic at the prop. "Contact!" echoed Morelux. A twist of the prop., and a roar that became almost deafening died down as Morelux tested his revolutions and throttled down. A wave of the hand—the mechanic pulled away the chocks from under the wheel, and lifted the tail round until the machine was heading up-wind; then with an increasing roar the machine gradually started off and leaped over the grass—a couple of slight bumps and they were off the ground, five feet, ten, forty, up and up they

soared, until after a couple of circuits round the aerodrome they had reached five hundred feet. Stilter glanced casually down and let out his aerial.

At eight thousand they had left the bumps far away below, and a few misty clouds raced away below them; in front of them, like some gigantic pock-marked morass, lay the salient and—Archie! To their left, far away, lay the grey sea, a thin white line marking the shore—and behind them great black clouds were banking up in large formidable rolls.

In another ten minutes they were engrossed in their job. Stilter, with one gloved hand on the wireless key, his languid attitude gone, was peering over the side absorbed in his "shoot."

Morelux's time was divided between his

instruments and rapid glances round the sky for enemy aircraft.

An hour went by. Suddenly Stilter, happening to glance round, was alarmed to see the great banks of thunder clouds coming up quickly behind them. He leant forward and touched Morelux's shoulder. Morelux looked round and took in the situation at a glance, and pointed downwards. Stilter nodded, and started to tap vigorously on the wireless key with one hand and wind up his aerial with the other.

Suddenly, without any warning, they were surrounded by the clouds, by a damp dark mist. Morelux pushed the joy stick forward and watched his altimeter—down, down, the air whistling and screaming through the wires—still clouds—clouds. Down again they went, their nose pointing

towards home and safety. Suddenly the ground appeared dark and foreboding beneath them. Stilter glanced over the pilot's shoulder at the altimeter—three thousand feet, then he looked down. Beneath them lay a mass of water. Morelux shut off the engine, and turning round shouted, "Where are we?" Stilter craned his neck about. "Over the floods," he shouted back, "but I'm not quite sure whereabouts."

Again he craned over the side—here and there a shattered home, roofless and desolate, stood out of the water.

Stilter glanced at the compass and noted they were going East. He waved to Morelux, and they turned round and flew straight for some minutes. Again he looked at the compass, and his heart for a second gave a flutter—it was still

pointing East. Morelux turned round and made faces. "It's stuck," he shouted.

Stilter nodded and leant over the side. Everything was wrong. He looked for the wood and the town and the canal, popular landmarks, landmarks that on a fine day one could see for miles.

Everything seemed changed. He looked at his map, turned it every way, but failed to locate any spot. Added to their already uncomfortable position, the mist was growing thicker. They could only see directly beneath them now. Stilter looked frantically round and breathed a prayer. Morelux turned round and shook his head. Stilter smiled cheerily and looked down again hopelessly. Presently he waved down. Far away he had spotted a crowd of little white demolished houses.

Eagerly he clung to the frail hope that it might be Y——, although it looked hopelessly unfamiliar. They dropped two thousand feet in a dive towards it, but as they got over the town four loud cracks from Archie just behind the machine disillusioned them, and they again dived off at right angles. A slight rain had started, and the drops cut against their goggles and windscreen, making the visibility almost impossible. Below the trenches had vanished, and a dismal, unfriendly looking country was spread out beneath them. Stilter threw his maps on the floor, and began to wonder if life in a prison camp was as bad as it was pictured; then he thought of the fire in the ante-room, and wondered who would have his hut. Suddenly the engine started spluttering. He saw Morelux bend forward;

that was the last straw. Morelux switched off, and turning round beamed at Stilter and pointed down. Not two thousand feet below lay a long straight canal.

Stilter suddenly laughed loudly, and then suddenly felt rather like crying; he seized his map. "Thank God—there's Y——"; and signalling to Morelux to switch on again, he hurriedly located their position.

Why on earth didn't Morelux switch on? They were dropping quickly, and were only about two thousand feet up now. He looked up. Morelux pointed to the petrol-gauge. It was empty. "Can we do it?" yelled Stilter. Morelux nodded dubiously. Fifteen hundred feet—a thousand—seven hundred. They were dropping rapidly. At last the aerodrome appeared out of the gloom; five hundred

feet, two hundred—it seemed as if they were just brushing the tree tops. At last they were over the aerodrome, a couple of bumps and they were on solid ground surrounded by mechanics.

They crawled out and, stretching themselves, walked over to the office. "Where the hell have you been?" said the Major. "Oh, we got a bit lost over the floods, sir," said Morelux. "Shoot any good?" "I think so, sir; we knocked out one gun position and put the wind up the rest," said Stilter. "Good enough, run along and get some tea." The door closed, and the Major stood for a moment looking out of the window. Then he opened a box, took out a cigarette, lit it thoughtfully, and his face wore a look of relief.

## *XVI.—Liaison*

## *Liaison*

In the ancient town of H—— is a market square; in the corner is a small shop; in the shop one may purchase the most exquisite chocolates. In the shop also is Juliette. When you first go into the shop you go to buy chocolates. Afterwards you very often go in just to see Juliette.

Sometimes when the War is far away, and the roll of London traffic fills the air, one meets a fellow-pilot who may have joined your Squadron after you left it, or who patronized a neighbouring one, and your thoughts become reminiscent. "Do you remember H——?" "Rather!" "Do you remember that

priceless little estaminet?" "Oh, yes—the Lion d'Or." "Yes, and did you ever meet Juliette?" In every French town one remembers a Juliette—a dark-haired girl, slim and smiling, with dancing dark eyes and long lashes—always laughing, always gay—ready to teach French or to be taught English. She never laughed at one's appalling French, and her lisping English made conversation very agreeable.

"Shall we visit the haunts of vice?" said Archant to Bobby one winter day. Bobby gazed at the heavy snow clouds hanging low in the sky and nodded. They dressed in all the finery of a clean tunic and a clean pair of boots, and having obtained leave set out upon the road to H——, a short mile away, with the happy feeling that the War was over for them till to-morrow morning. "First of all,"

said Archant, "I must buy some shaving soap, and here is the very shop we want." Bobby gazed dubiously at the groceries displayed in the window and followed Archant. "Leave the door open," said Archant with an experienced air. Bobby wondering left the door open, but once inside ceased to wonder, and gasped, "By Jove, Archant, give me a cigarette." An old lady appeared behind the counter looking remarkably healthy considering the closeness of the atmosphere, her hands full of knitting implements and wool.

"Bon jour, M'sieurs." "Good afternoon," said Archant. "Have you any shaving soap?" The old lady smiled pleasantly and inclined her head. "Pardon, M'sieur." Archant gazed round the shop, but found no assistance. "Avez-vous, de—de—." "What is it, Bobby?"

Bobby chuckled, "Rub your chin." "Oh, yes—Madame—chose pour shaving." An enlightened look passed over the old lady's face. She waddled to the window and presently produced a deadly-looking razor with a happy smile. Archant shook his head sadly and began to simulate a barber lathering Bobby. "Ah, oui, j' comprends." The old lady produced a shaving brush and a stick of soap. Archant seized upon the soap. They left the old lady smiling happily, and arrived at the Square. "It's your turn to buy something now," said Archant. Bobby looked nervous and pointed to a small shop in the corner. "Let's get some chocolates." They crossed over to the shop and went in. There was a peculiar absence of that aging element known as "fug," and as they looked

at each other with questioning eyebrows a small door opened and a girl smiled behind the counter. "Bon jour, M'sieur." Bobby's pink face took a slightly deeper shade. "Bon jour," said Archant and started to discuss the prices and species of chocolates in a language which was more English than French. Juliette neither winced nor smiled at hearing her language distorted almost beyond recognition. "Monsieur parle bien," she said quietly. Bobby drew his breath in sharply. "I thought," he said, "it was my turn to buy something!" Half an hour later they were having tea in the Lion d'Or. "Not a bad girl," said Archant. "Not bad," said Bobby, "got rather a big mouth." "Yes, and I didn't care much for the way she did her hair," said Archant. "No," said Bobby.

* * * * *

"Come in," said the Major. Bobby entered the office and saluted. "Is there anything for me to do, sir, this afternoon?"

The Major looked at the rain pattering on the window and shook his head. "Could I go to H——. I've got several things I want to buy." "All right," said the Major.

Bobby felt excited when he reached the Square at H——. He paused in front of a small chocolate shop and lit a cigarette. He noticed casually that there was an officer inside. Bobby took a long time to light the cigarette. He did it very carefully, and by the time he had put his matches away and buttoned up his coat again the officer had left. "Ah, bon jour, Monsieur Aviateur; votre ami ne viént pas c' après midi?" Juliette

raised her pretty eyebrows and smiled. "No!" said Bobby, "he couldn't come this afternoon—he was busy." It was at that moment that the lie was punished. The door opened, a bell tinkled, and Archant walked in. Bobby said an extremely unpleasant word under his breath.

*" Bangers "*

## *"Bangers"*

THE flares on the aerodrome lit up the dim forms round them with a flickering light. McGuy looked up at the star-lit sky and buttoned up his coat collar. "Hell of a game," he murmured, and thought of the stove in his hut, and Bobby lying an inert lump in bed. A far away clock struck eleven as McGuy climbed into his machine. The engine suddenly roared and softened down. The machine taxied out towards the flares and turned into the wind. Again the engine roared, and the machine leapt forward and rose into the air. When distance had softened the roar of the engine to a gentle murmur, a bored mechanic yawned

and turned towards the sheds, taking the whole thing as a matter of course. McGuy, from a height of two thousand feet, looked up at the cold twinkling stars, and down again at the tiny points of fire—the flares on the aerodrome. For ten more minutes he climbed, and then turned towards the East. Far away behind him a dim searchlight moved in a white line about the sky. A tiny electric bulb lit up his instruments and map. McGuy yawned and began to hum to himself. There was nothing but black all around him now. Even the pale light of the stars had been obscured by fleecy clouds. Far below tiny Very lights faded above the trenches.

McGuy glanced at his map and slightly altered his direction. His feet were getting cold and he stamped them on the floor. Presently he glanced again at his

map and down at a few misty lights clustering in front far below. His heart beat slightly faster as he shut off his engine and started to spiral down.

The whistling wires sounded very soft after the even roar of the engine. Suddenly a great pencil of white light shot up from the ground and formed a white circle on the clouds above him. Two more on either side leapt up and began to wave from side to side. McGuy turned and dived, and the whistle of the wires rose to a scream. Suddenly one of the great beams of light caught him, and for a moment dazzled him. "Damn and blast!" he murmured as he turned and twisted, but the beam held him, and the two others raced across the sky to add to his discomfiture. Four balls of flame burst away on his right with sharp

"crumps." Again he dived and twisted, and suddenly found himself in the dark. He glanced at his altimeter; the tiny luminous needle pointed to 500.

For a moment he glanced anxiously below, wishing he had the advantage of a cat's eyes, and then released a bomb. A few seconds of suspense, and a tiny flame burst up from the ground, revealing for a moment a few trees and a house and a sparkle of water. McGuy swore loudly and dived. The searchlights were waving excitedly round the sky, groping with their long white arms to find him.

At two hundred feet he flattened out. A watery moon had risen and by its dim light, with a sigh of relief, he caught sight of his landmark. Again he released a bomb and watched. By the glare of the explosion he saw a large building and a

few dim houses around it. Quickly he released the remainder and started to climb. A huge red glare flickered round his machine, and looking down he saw great red flames and rosy clouds of smoke curling up; tiny figures surged down the narrow roads. Turning towards the West he climbed as fast as he could. Again the machine was lit up in a blinding glare of white light, and again McGuy swore loudly. Shells began to burst above him and in front of him. The sky in front seemed to be alive with great red flashes. Twisting and turning he tried to avoid them. The remorseless light held him, and a sudden deafening crash made the machine shiver and tremble like a frightened animal. " All right—damn you! " he murmured, and turning dived at the great white eye beneath. The cold

wind raced against his face and screamed around. He pressed the trigger of the gun, and the eye winked for a moment at him and disappeared. Again he turned and faced the bursting shells. Far away beyond he saw a dim friendly searchlight groping round the stars. A sudden blinding flash in front made his heart leap, and the acrid smell of powder, as he flew through the smoke of the shell, made him wrinkle his nose.

With a sigh of relief he saw a Very light pop up below him, and a moment later the tiny flames on the aerodrome flickered and beckoned to him. He switched off and spiralled down. The lights grew larger and larger, and a moment later he was skimming between them. "Any luck?" said the Major, as McGuy entered the office blowing on his fingers.

McGuy tried to conceal an intensely satisfied feeling behind a bored expression. " Yes, sir, I think I got it." " Good enough," said the Major, and turned towards the telephone.

*The Vacant Seat*

## *The Vacant Seat*

WHEN one first goes out to France leave is so remote that one doesn't think about it, but as time goes on, senior people start to go and one finds oneself looking more often at the leave roaster. Cautious remarks creep into letters, and in the peace and silence of one's bed, leave assumes a more concrete aspect. Though still dim and distant, plans begin to formulate, and very likely the bank pass book arrives and calculations follow.

On the Friday of the particular week I'm thinking about, Jimmy had just finished giving the Major his report after a long and trying patrol when the telephone rang. The Major listened,

smiled, and looked at the leave roaster. Jimmy's eyes followed the Major's, and with a slight thumping in the left side of his breast realized that the next to go on leave was himself. "Right," said the Major down the telephone. "Lieut. James—good-bye-e-e." Jimmy tried to look nonchalant. The Major turned. "There's a seat going to-morrow, Jimmy." Jimmy smiled, thanked the Major, saluted and hurried away. Leave had at last become a reality.

The first thing he did was to write two letters. They were brief and contained the plans which for weeks he had been formulating, but had not dared to actually write.

The next thing he did was to arrange an "occasion," to cheer up the people who weren't going on leave.

The following morning he awoke with a feeling of impending pleasure—and realizing quickly the full significance of the feeling, dressed himself rapidly, packed slowly, dwelling happily on every article he put in his suit case and for the remainder of the morning made himself a general nuisance on the areodrome, pointing out to pilots who were just going "up" the extraordinary prevalence of "Archie" and imaginary "Huns." "I think we're going to have a spell of fine weather now," he persisted in remarking to anyone who would listen to him.

Twelve o'clock and the tender arrived, and Jimmy emerged from his hut as spotless as his servant, who had laboured for two hours the night before, could make him.

His face was shining and was wreathed in smiles, and his pockets bulged with a dozen written injunctions from the other less fortunate pilots whose wardrobe or cigarette cases required replenishing.

Followed by half-a-dozen "good-bye-e-e's" the tender moved off, and Jimmy sank back and puffed at his cigarette with a feeling of perfect and absolute content.

There are few men, now, that have not experienced that feeling, which no words can describe, of standing on the deck and watching the cliffs of England grow nearer and larger.

England!—after five months of war. Jimmy found himself talking to strange people as if he had known them all his life. Already France was in the dim past. Was it only twenty-four hours or

a week ago that he had left the aerodrome and the ominous sounds of distant Archie guns.

With an ear-splitting roar the syren called to the harbour. The boat slipped alongside the quay and Jimmy, with a bag clasped in his right hand and a stick in the left, found himself in the tide of happy people, being borne over the gangway and down towards the train.

There were many things he noticed with subconscious pleasure. Boys were shouting in Cockney English, there was an air of method and cleanliness about the Pullman Car, English papers were pushed under his nose, and the English air smelt wonderfully sweet and fresh. Jimmy pressed his nose against the window, and watched the green fields and hedges racing by. The speed of the train

after the agonizing crawl of the French train sent a thrill through him.

The fields changed to houses. With a rumble they crossed the Thames and five minutes later slowed up alongside the platform. With a bang Jimmy wrenched the door open and sprang out. For a moment he glanced round hesitatingly, and then he caught sight of two ladies —one elderly and the other one young; both were smiling with curious lights in their eyes. Jimmy advanced. The war was forgotten.

*Fritz*

## *Fritz*

"HULLO," said someone, "there's a Hun." All eyes were at once turned up in the direction of the pointed finger, and the air was filled with experienced surmises as to the species. Far above the small white speck pursued its course with absolute indifference to the small white clustering puffs from the anti-aircraft guns, and after circling once or twice over the aerodrome slowly drifted out of sight. It was so unusual a sight for a Hun to appear alone in the full daylight six miles over the line, that as a topic of conversation it lasted for quite a long while. "I bet we're bombed to-night," said the Squadron pessimist. "I expect some of his pals

dared him to do it, or he did it for a bet." The War Baby smiled. "It must have been a hell of a bet to make him come right over here!"

No bombs disturbed their sleep that night, but next morning the Hun appeared at the same time flying over the same course.

It looked so fat and lazy and insolent, as it quietly hummed high above the drifting clouds, that the Major frowned and retired into the office with the senior Flight Commander.

Presently the Flight Commander reappeared, smiling. Nine o'clock the following morning a large German, expensively clad in furs, walked slowly across an aerodrome six miles over the wrong side of the line.

His breakfast had been a good one, but

his mind seemed to be uneasy and he frowned as he walked. By the sheds a large machine was gently swaying to the breeze. "Our final trip," he grunted to the Sergeant Pilot. The pilot sprung to attention with an expressionless face.

A few minutes later they were roaring up into the wind, and the fur-clad figure in the back seat gazed dubiously towards the West. It wasn't until the altimeter registered twelve thousand feet that they left the aerodrome and headed towards the trenches. The Observer gazed languidly round the empty skies, and settled himself more comfortably in his seat.

As they passed over the trenches a few shells started to burst with sudden crumps behind them. The German smiled. "So bad, they've given it up," he murmured, as the bursts got further away and eventually

stopped. A few minutes later he was leaning over the side, peering down at the little line of sheds at the edge of an aerodrome, his hand resting lovingly on the bomb release. He noted with satisfaction that a line of machines lay close together outside the hangars. Directed by a wave of his hand to the pilot the machine swung gently round, and he was about to release his bombs when an uncanny feeling made him glance round over his shoulder; he dropped the bomb release and seized his gun. Not fifty yards behind a machine was flying slightly above them. As he seized his gun a stream of flashing bullets cracked past his head. Cursing at the top of his voice, he signalled rapidly to the pilot. In a second the machine tilted down and flashed away in a vertical nose

dive. Two thousand feet below the pilot pulled it out, and the Observer gazed round with terrified eyes.

There above them at the same distance was the tiny scout. The bullets started again to crack round him; he caught hold of his gun and pulled the trigger, firing wildly in circles round the machine above him. A sudden jar on his elbow and a numbing pain down his right arm made him drop the gun with a curse. A hopeless feeling of terror obsessed his mind, and he turned and shrieked at the pilot, "Dive! Get away from the devil for the love of God!" A bullet tore a burning line across his cheek. He turned again, and as he looked a flame burst from the front of his machine and leapt towards him along the fabric. White-faced and shivering he watched the pilot struggling

with the little tube of fire extinguisher. The smouldering fabric burst into flame, and furiously he tried to beat it out with his gloves, but in a second the fire was all round him. Dimly he heard the pilot screaming through the cloud of smoke. They were flashing down in a wild uncontrolled dive. The wind screamed around him ; the flames leapt about his leather coat and tore the skin from his face with burning fingers.

* * * * *

Two hundred feet above a little scout flew around in circles. The pilot was gazing down at the black smoking patch in the centre of a ploughed field below.

*Mr. Meteor*

## *Mr. Meteor*

I KNOW few people so persistently optimistic as Mr. Meteor. Although I have never met him, I have frequently thought of him as a little short fellow with a high brow, wrinkled by concentration, sitting on his lawn surrounded by his favourite instruments. The day is a summer one and the heat shimmers up from the ground, making one long for the sound and touch of cool, clear water. Mr. Meteor sits with a large white handkerchief over his head, watching the clouds. "Poor lads," he murmurs sympathetically from time to time.

Amongst the mass of important envelopes on the Major's desk, lies a modest

little note, the weather report for to-morrow. It portends rain, and breezes from the north; the sky will be partly covered by clouds—the temperature is going down.

The Major sitting in the hot little office, his coat off and shirt sleeves rolled up, his forehead damp with perspiration, feels stronger. The vision of the fresh glittering raindrops and cool cloud shadows fill him with thankfulness. "Ah," he says to Jewsker Broske, the gaunt Australian Flight Commander, "thank God, the weather is going to change." "I hope it won't get too cold to bathe," says Broske.

The morrow dawns, a cloudless sky, the sun rises and starts to burn. "I expect the clouds will be coming up soon," says Broske; "fine before seven rain at eleven, you know." At eleven the sky is still an unbroken sketch of blue, and the sun burns

more than ever. The Major glances at Mr. Meteor's note a little dubiously.

The sun subsides in a blaze of red and ends one of the warmest days of the year.

But no one can be angry with Mr. Meteor, he always means so well.

On one occasion he certainly was a little bit trying. It was during a spell of dud weather, when the mist and heavy clouds made aerial war an impossibility.

For two days we had been idling and polishing our French in the neighbouring towns, happy days they were. On the third day the Major found a little note from Mr. Meteor:—"Visibility to-morrow will be good, clouds nil, temperature rising, wind moderate." The Major at once detailed the machines and we all stood by. We stood by for three days before we realized that Mr. Meteor was merely perpetrating

another of his little jokes upon us, and who can say, now we understand him, how much we would miss that happy little optimistic note from Mr. Meteor if for one day it failed to turn up. Who can say? I can't!

# *Side Shows*

## *Side Shows*

It came through in the late afternoon of a grilling summer's day. We were idling in towels on the bank of the canal, watching the stream move slowly down with its burden of defunct animals. (It took more than a week-dead cat to stop one plunging into the cool water during those hot summer days, when the simple effort of walking assumed the proportions of violent exercise and made one's clothes wet with perspiration.)

Jimmy was nonchalantly throwing stones at a piece of flotsam which might have once been a dog, when a panting orderly arrived. "All officers wanted at the office, sir!" We dressed rapidly

with the feeling of "coming events," and walked quickly to the office. The C.O. in his shirt sleeves was sucking a pencil, and before him on the table lay large maps. We gathered round him and listened intently. That night we talked in measured tones about the show that was coming, observers and pilots closeted themselves together with maps, paste, and three-ply, and argued about which would search the ground and which would distend his eyeballs up into the skies in search of cross-marked enemies. The mechanical maniac doubled his output of gadgets and spent most of the night in the workshop lorry, fiddling with wires and wheels. Very early the next morning a dull roll of guns started, punctuated every few minutes by thudding explosions.

On the aerodrome, in the dawn-mist,

dim figures pulled the machines out, and muffled figures climbed into them. The engines roared and softened down as they taxied out on to the aerodrome. One by one they roared up into the air. Billy, sitting with fur up to his eyes, felt that "early morning" feeling acutely and looked down rather enviously at the huts below, where several happy aviators, whose jobs started at ten o'clock, still slept profoundly. "How I should love to know," murmurs the fond mother, "what the brave lad's thoughts were about!" The brave lad's thoughts were probably more or less after this fashion: "Wish to God I'd shoved on that extra pair of socks." "Where the hell did I put that pencil?" "Lucky fellows those Inland Water Transport." "What the hell do they want to send us up so damned

early for ? Shan't see a thing." "Might have easily had another hour in bed without spoiling the war." "Funny-shaped head old Nimrod's got" (the pilot in front). "Wonder where he gets his flying cap from." "By jove, look at that." Billy, craning over the side, saw long lines of shells bursting without cessation about the trenches in a sea of small white puffs. From time to time a red tongue of flame would shoot up and give way to a roll of black smoke.

The stars had quite gone, and the pale sun drove away the light curtain of mist. Archie started and crumped vigorously behind them. The sky was full of machines above and below—large single ones, intent on their shoots, swift small ones darting like dragon flies, escorting clusters of large bombing formations droning eastwards with their load of bombs, while

around them all was a halo of black smudgy Archie. Far below were the little contact patrol machines zigzagging along engaged in their hazardous task of supplying Headquarters with a constant stream of information in the form of messages clothed in gaudy streamers. Behind them lay a silent row of observation balloons.

Billy looked at his watch and glanced down—the barrage was lifting and moving forward. A line of squat black things were moving after it. Billy's lips formed the word "Tanks" as he patted his pilot's head and pointed down.

The pilot nodded and, looking down, waggled his joy-stick in appreciation of the extraordinary scene. Billy scanned the skies, with a finger on his gun—once or twice a machine started to dive on

them, but quickly turned when it spotted their rings.

When they had finished their shoot, and had seen with satisfaction their target in flames, they dived down towards the trenches and home. For a time they watched the shells bursting in the apparently empty Hun trenches; then as the bumps from passing explosives and the rat-tat-tat of machine guns was becoming unhealthy, they climbed up again and turned towards the aerodrome and breakfast. It's not an unpleasant sensation after three and a-half hours in an atmosphere full of war and hate, to shut off the engine and glide quietly back to the aerodrome. The wind no longer shrieks at you as it rushes by, the quiet whistles of the propeller is very soothing after the roar of the engine, and the probability is that

your job's over for the day, and you've got the pleasant anticipation of a good meal and about sixteen or seventeen hours' peace and happiness before the next errand to Hunland starts.

At breakfast the air was full of "Did you see the ——?" "My engine was priceless; going like this"—little Morelux growled in an attempt to imitate the even roar of a well-running engine. "Yes, I saw two batteries go up in flames." "Gawd, only two? I saw five." "See the Tanks; oh, priceless"— and so on. Every now and then another couple of oil-smudged aviators would enter, full of new incidents and casting happy eyes at the eggs and bacon.

By nine o'clock the aerodrome was deserted, every machine was in the air; a few mechanics, idle for the moment,

gazed eastwards at the tiny dots flying about like angry bees, pursued by tiny balls of black. A Napoleonic figure in a black leather coat stood watching the distant scene through a pair of binoculars, longing to be "up" and sharing the excitement with his pilots. In many ways, "The Major's" lot was a hard one; and he hated the telephone and the small voice that whispers, "One of your machines down at ——."

Towards evening the visibility began to get bad, and one by one the machines returned and the pilots, tired and dirty, crowded into the office to make their reports.

A dishevelled recording officer wrote feverishly in a large book. In every case the answer to "any enemy aircraft seen?" was "Nil," but everyone had a lot to say about their shoots!

At six o'clock the light was very bad; all the machines, except one, were down. Four or five pilots were out on the aerodrome, watching a black speck that was droning in from the east. "There he is," said someone. "No, it isn't," said someone else. "Yes, it is." "No, it isn't," as the speck passed over the aerodrome and droned on away to the west. A few minutes later another speck appeared, and this time it grew larger, spiralled down, landed, and out jumped Billy and his pilot, rosy and oily. Explanations followed. "Everyone down," said Billy. "Everyone O.K.," said someone, and arm-in-arm they all wandered over to the Mess to wash and change. Later on the news came through that the show had been a "walk over," so to speak; and at the same time came a polite message of congratulation

on the squadron's efforts from a great man. There was "beaucoup" jubilation in the Mess that night.

## *Ten Minutes*

## *Ten Minutes*

Extract from any Daily Paper :—" Two enemy machines were brought down in flames."

Extract from Official Communique :—" Lieut. Smith and Lieut. Jones, No. Umpteen Squadron, whilst on artillery observation were attacked by two E. A. scouts, one of which they shot down in flames, the other was last seen going down in a vertical nose dive."

" Contact," said Smith looking over his shoulder at Williams. Williams smiled and nodded, the engine roared and they taxied out into the wind; quickly they rose up into the air and droned away to the east. A few minutes

later Williams was gazing round the blue and white sky and tapping pensively on the wireless key. Tiny figures far below pulled out white signals. He watched until they had finished, then he put his hand out, squeezed his pilot's shoulder and pointed towards the target which was a blue-blurred wood some miles over the line. Smith nodded and headed towards it.

A thin bank of mist a few hundred feet above them smudged the sky to a pale blue. They were over the target now, and as Williams was gazing down a sudden startling crack by his head made him leap round and seize his gun. He stared up into the blazing sun, a blurred black object was swooping down upon them—again the cracks started and their machine started to quiver. Quickly sighting his gun he

pulled the trigger, cool fingered and steady, and followed the enemy machine as it dived; his gun suddenly stopped, and he cursed at the top of his voice. Smith was banking vertically, and he struggled to get his gun going again.

They were now on top of the Hun, who had finished his dive and was turning; their forward gun started as they dived on the twisting scout. Williams, out of one eye, saw the stream of flashing bullets pass right into the middle of the machine, but nothing seemed to happen. He got his gun going again, and as they dived past he fired into the scout from point blank range. With a feeling of wild excitement and elation he saw it side-slip and spin, while a great stream of black smoke and flame poured out of the fusilage. Smith was leaning over the side watching,

and Williams patted him on the back with a trembling gloved hand. Again Williams' heart suddenly leaped and raced, a feeling as if someone had brought a cane hard down an inch from his foot made him wheel round; he had a vision of a white machine with great black smudges on its wings diving at them from the left. "Gawd," he whispered, and hit his pilot and pointed. Almost simultaneously their machine banked vertically and stalling they faced the enemy. The forward gun again began to spit out fire—while bullets from the Hun splintered and cracked about their heads.

As the German machine flashed by them, Williams had an instant vision of a black, muffled figure crouching inside the black and white body, and then in a moment it had disappeared below them,

and while Williams watched it came into view again, falling like a stone far away below until it vanished into the mist.

They were gliding quietly towards the lines, Williams lay back and wondered what his pilot's thoughts were about. With a soft whistle of the propeller they glided on to the aerodrome and bumped to a standstill.

Williams got out, and suddenly realised he was trembling. He got out a cigarette, and after a rapid inspection of their machine, which was full of holes and tears, they strode arm in arm to the office.

Two figures in oily leather coats and with dishevelled hair stood before the Major in the office. "Do any good?" said the Major.

Smith, the pilot, smiled. "I'm afraid we couldn't finish that shoot, sir, we were

attacked by two E. A." "No?" said the Major, looking serious. "Yes, sir,—Jones and I," said Smith, nodding his head at Jones, who was still quivering with excitement. "Jones and I had only just got over the target, when one of the dirty dogs dived on our tail, between the sun. We banked as hard as we could, and Jones loosed off with his gun." "The damned gun jambed," broke in Jones breathlessly. "He got it going again," continued Smith, "and the little blighter must have got him in the second burst, because he went down with gubbins and flame and stuff pouring out." "Nonsense," said Jones, "it was your gun that got him—just after we turned." "And then," said Smith, ignoring the interruption, "we were just watching him go down when a couple of bullets got

my altimeter." Jones, refusing to remain passive any longer, exploded with long pent-up emotions. "We got round again and I pooped off as hard as I could, but the gun stopped again and I couldn't clear it, but Smith got round and put a couple of good bursts into the Hun just as he was turning to climb. Nothing seemed to happen for a moment and I thought he'd missed, when suddenly the Hun side-slipped, spun, flattened out, and went down in a split-act dive. We couldn't see him crash, as he went into a bank of mist near the ground."

"Damn good!" said the Major, beaming, as he turned towards the telephone.

# *The Last Flight*

## *The Last Flight*

It was a fairly fine day, and the ante-room was almost empty. Three people sprawled in unconventional attitudes in three arm-chairs—Archant, the Squadron lunatic; Billy, the War Baby; and Ethelred, the Unready. Archant was fair, with tousled hair; Billy—well every one knows the War Baby; and Ethelred was plump, always well-groomed, and always unready. Archant was absorbed in the English translation of a French novel; Ethelred was attempting to make a dishevelled fly loop the loop; and Billy was looking disconsolate and very bored. "Take a pair of sparkling eyes," sung Billy in uncertain tones. "Go and take them outside,"

said Archant unfeelingly, and turned over a page. "Ethelred, old Bean," said Billy, breaking the silence five minutes later, "what's your greatest worry?" "Getting out of bed," answered the looping instructor promptly, as the fly, wearied unto death, dropped on to the floor. "What's yours?" "I think," said Billy plaintively, "Archant is." Ethelred looked at Archant, remembered Billy was his Observer, and nodded his head slowly. "Yes, I don't wonder. Yes, I should hate to have a pilot like that—it looks so bad, doesn't it?" "What the devil do you mean—you blistered son of a Hun?" said Archant loudly. Billy screamed and emulated a lady of fashion afflicted with the vapours. "Who was it that fired on one of his own machines, eh?" continued Archant, brutally referring to an old *contre-temps*.

Ethelred, taken unawares, groped for red hot words. Fortunately, an orderly entered and saluted at Archant. "Wanted in the office, sir." Archant nodded "Right," and seizing his cap disappeared through the window. Billy sniffed. "I have an ugly presentiment, Ethelred, that shortly I shall be compelled to aviate." "Your presentiment," said Ethelred—safe with a cut hand—"is not without foundation. Archant is waving from the office. Go, my child, and Allah be with you."

Billy flung a magazine at Ethelred's sleek hair and walked out towards the office. Archant met him with outstretched hands. "Fly with me, little one?" Billy grunted, "What have we got to do?" "One little trench reconnaissance—is it so much I ask of you?"

Billy frowned, " Oh, dry up and let's see." Archant produced photographs and a sheet of paper on which several leading questions were type-written—first, an arrow pointing to a small pin-point on the photograph and the question, " Is this a cookhouse ? " —another arrow pointing to a brown mess and the question " What is this ? " and so on. They studied them at length. Twenty minutes later little Billy, enveloped in vast quantities of fur clothing, gazed inquisitively over the side of the machine at the trenches below. He was attempting from a height of 1,500 feet to discover if the pin-point on the photograph actually was a cookhouse, or if it was a machine gun emplacement covered in subtle camouflage. From time to time Archant wrote messages on a writing block in front of him, which Billy, leaning

over his shoulder, read with difficulty. "We'd better go down a bit." Billy nodded with an expressionless face, and as Archant switched off the engine they could faintly hear the tat-tat-tat of machine guns and the occasional crack of a well-aimed bullet by their speeding heads. They were far too low for Archie's groping burst, and Huns seldom ventured to such low altitudes over the trenches, so they had only Fritz's rifle and machine gun bullets to cope with. Billy watched the altimeter; the needle quivered round 1,500—1,000.

Archant switched on, and with a spluttering roar the engine burst into song again. Billy fixed his eyes on the trenches below, and tried to ignore the zip-zip of a couple of bullets that splintered the wood work, besides his arm.

Down they roared until they could see the white upturned faces of the crouching figures in the trenches, and then with a shriek of wires Archant pulled her up, and they shot up again towards the West. After the fourth dive Billy had answered most of the required questions, but to make sure of the last he signalled to Archant to dive again. Archant frowned and looked at the rev-counter needle, which was quivering and dropping, but nodded his head and banked again. A whistling shriek of wires and they dived, with the engine spluttering badly—down, down, down—the wind screaming by their ears—and then suddenly Billy's heart and the engine ceased almost simultaneously—but Billy's heart went on with redoubled vigour. Archant was calmly fiddling with something in front. They were two hundred

feet now, and the bullets were ripping, splintering and tearing the fabric all round them. A wire broke with a metallic "ping," and Billy clenched his hands for a moment—then, thrusting his papers into his pockets, he seized his gun and pulling back the cocking handle pulled the trigger, spraying the crouching figures in the trenches with bursts of tracer bullets. Archant, the Squadron lunatic, when the engine stopped, drew a sudden breath, and his hands tightened on the joy stick —a bullet splashed a score of splinters round his face and made him shake his head, and then he laughed as he caught sight of the switch—his elbow had knocked it up. "Jove, what a damned fool!" he whispered, and quickly pressed it down.

A hesitating splutter, and the engine burst into a tremulous roar. They were

a hundred feet now, and had left the trenches away behind them. Billy had stopped firing, and with the engine going well Archant cast a quick look behind him. He saw Billy lying in a curiously pathetic heap. "Gad!" he whispered, and quickly looked for the nearest aerodrome. At last he caught sight of the hangars, and glided quickly down to a gentle standstill. Mechanics ran out as they arrived, and Archant turned round in his seat. Billy looked up plaintively—white-faced. "I'm all right, old Bean! I caught one in the tummy I think," he gasped.

Carefully they lifted him out and put him on a stretcher. "In my pocket," he gasped painfully. Archant nodded, and putting his hand in Billy's pocket drew out the photographs and papers. "I — put — the — wind — up — the Huns," whispered Billy, and fainted.

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